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## ETYMOLOGY.



“ L'art etymologique est l'art de débrouiller ce que déguise les mots, de les dépouiller de ce, qui, pour ainsi dire, leur est étranger, et, par ce moyen, de les ramener à la simplicité, qu'ils ont tous dans leur origine.” *Mem. de l'Acad. des Inscr. &c.*

AMONG the various pursuits of the human mind none, perhaps, has grown more into disrepute than Etymology; and this as well from the temerity of some of its advocates as from the ignorance and inexperience of others. While on the one hand it has been employed to promote the idle sallies of an untutored imagination, it has, on the other, been converted into the means of supporting the wildest and most unreasonable hypotheses. From this it has resulted, that the crude and visionary speculations of many pretenders to this art have been assumed as an incontrovertible proof of the fallacy of the art itself; and the inutility of etymological researches has, in consequence, almost passed into a proverb. But, there is something extremely unfair, as well as illogical, in this mode of reasoning; for, how much soever this art may have been abused, it by no means follows, that the principles, on which it is founded, are therefore to be impugned, or its legitimate objects to be set down as of no real value. Etymology, in the language of the preceding motto, is the art of disengaging words from the adscititious incumbrances, which time or custom may have produced, and of restoring them to that simplicity, which belonged to their original character. And, as long as a proper knowledge of words shall be essential to our acquaintance with things, this pursuit can not be regarded as unimportant.

It is somewhat singular, that the word *Etymology* itself furnishes an extraordinary instance of the advantages to be occasionally derived from a proper use of this science. The definition of the term is thus given by a celebrated French writer. “ In the most ancient Oriental tongues,” observes M. de Gebelin in his *Monde Primitif*\*, “ there exists a word, written in Hebrew תומ, which we write and pronounce indiscriminately *Tom*, *Tum*, *Tym*. It is a radical word signifying perfection in a proper or physical sense, and, in a figurative or moral one, accomplishment, truth, justice. Amongst the Hebrews and Arabians it has formed adjectives and verbs. This word, united by the Greeks with the article E and adopting their termination ος, became the

\* Tom. iii. p. 19.

adjective *ετυμος*, which signifies true or just, while they suffered it to lose all its other acceptations. The Greeks, again, uniting with this word the term *λογια*, which implied with them discourse or knowledge, made of it the word *Ετυμολογια*, which we pronounce *Etymology*, and which, consequently, signifies a perfect science, and they designed thereby the knowledge of the origin and import of words." If this definition be correct, and there seems no reason for questioning its propriety, it will appear, that some acquaintance with the earliest languages of antiquity must, on many occasions, be necessary to a successful cultivation of etymological inquiries. And, indeed, the prevailing error of etymologists, as well as the general cause of their failure, is the imperfect notion they have formed, in this respect, of the principles of their science. While some are satisfied with the first definition, that presents itself even in a modern language, of a word, that may be avowedly of ancient extraction, others consider their work complete, if they can trace the object of their research to the Latin or Greek tongues, as though they contained the elements of all human speech.\* Some writers of great repute have fallen into this last mentioned fault, which has occasioned the adoption of many absurd conclusions. And, indeed, with reference to the errors here noticed, it may justly be observed, in the words of the French author already cited, that "etymologists have in their hands a two-edged weapon, which has wounded most of those, who have endeavoured to use it."

Obvious as the truth of this observation must be, there is no instance, in which it is more evident than in the attempts made by some writers to define those words, of which the true etymons are only to be found in the Welsh language, or at least in that, of which the Welsh retains the most perfect remains. Some instances of the blunders, committed in this respect, will be noticed hereafter: and, in the mean time, a few preliminary remarks on the aid to be derived in etymological researches from a knowledge of the Welsh tongue may not be deemed unnecessary or uninteresting.

It will perhaps be admitted—for the subject has been very ably investigated—that Europe was originally peopled by two principal colonies, the earliest of whom arrived most probably at

\* For some judicious observations respecting this common error the reader is referred to the *Archæologia Britannica*, p. 36, where the learned author has made a brief examination of the subject. A few instances, illustrative of it, may also be seen in the same work, p. 267.

no distant period after the great Dispersion at Babel. These, according to Herodotus and other historians of credit, were called Cimmerians or Cimbrians and Scythians, the first of the two having preceded the latter some ages, and having previously penetrated to the more remote or Western parts of the country they had possessed. Later writers indeed have confounded the Cimbrians with the Gauls, Celts, and other tribes, who were, however, properly speaking, so many distinct branches of the original stock, and derived their appellations from the several characteristics, local or personal, by which they were distinguished\*. The original language of this Western portion of Europe was, therefore, the Cimbric, and not, as it has generally been called, the Celtic, which was no more than a dialect of that primitive tongue. Notwithstanding that some authors of acknowledged celebrity have adopted the error here noticed†, the fact of the Cimmerii or Cimbri having first inhabited this part of the world justifies the natural inference, that they communicated their name to their language. Indeed we have the testimony of some ancient writers that this was the case‡.

Now, the Cimbric being acknowledged as the mother tongue of a great portion of Europe, it will also be admitted, that it must have been, to the same extent, directly or indirectly, the basis of the various languages now spoken, as it was of those no longer in use. Yet, from the many casualties, to which most of these dia-

\* This mode of discrimination was very common among the early inhabitants of this country, and particularly in the names, adopted afterwards by the Romans in their divisions of the island, and which are clearly of Welsh extraction. It would far exceed the limits of a note to particularise these here; but a very full explanation of them may be seen in the second volume of the Cambrian Register. The appellations, by which the inhabitants of Ireland and Scotland were also known to the ancient Britons [Gwyddelod and Ysgodogion], were of the same description. The English terms Highlanders and Lowlanders, as well as that of Backwoodsmen, used in America, are formed on the same principle.

† Among these must be mentioned Mr. Edw. Llwyd in his "Archæologia," and Mr. Davis in his "Celtic Researches," notwithstanding the frequent allusions that appear in the latter work to the Cyniriy or Cimbri as the original inhabitants of Europe.

‡ The elder Pliny, in particular, gives it this name, and quotes, out of Philemon, a Cimbric word, which he calls *Morimarusa*, and considers to be the only word extant of that ancient tongue. Making due allowance for the Roman termination, *Morimarusa* is a Welsh word signifying the Dead Sea, to which, indeed, Pliny applies it.

lects have, in the lapse of time, been exposed, the original elements have, in some of them, been but faintly preserved, while in others they are almost entirely lost. It belongs, however, to a more extended dissertation to examine the interesting particulars connected with this inquiry,—the origin and progress of the several languages under consideration, with the different revolutions they have hitherto undergone. It will suffice for the present purpose to know, that among the Western tongues of Europe the Welsh is the only one, which can not be proved to have experienced numerous innovations in its original structure \*. If the reason of this distinction in favour of the Welsh language be sought, it may be found partly in the isolated situation, to which it has been so long confined †, partly in the extraordinary cultivation which it received under the Bardic institution, but, above all, in that peculiar and innate energy of the language itself, which, by confining it to its own resources, has secured it both from embellishment and corruption by any extraneous means ‡.

What has just been stated is capable of theoretical proof; but it may also be ascertained, in a very material degree, from the

\* This characteristic of the Welsh tongue will necessarily come under discussion hereafter. With respect to the other languages of Europe, they are all to be traced to their sources, as the members of particular families. The Welsh stands alone; and its fountain is hidden in the venerable shade of antiquity.

† Mr. Edw. Llwyd has on this point the following just observation. "It must be allowed, that the Celtic [Cimbric] has been best preserved by such of its colonies, as, from the situation of their country, have been the least subject to foreign invasions, whence it proceeds, that we always find the ancient languages are best retained in mountains and islands." Arch. Brit. p. 35. This remark is peculiarly applicable to the language of Wales, which has not only been confined, for numberless ages, to an island, but, for more than a thousand years, to the most mountainous part of it.

‡ This remark must be taken to apply to the general character of the language, and not to those verbal innovations, which were unavoidably adopted, in the first place, from the Romans, to express the arts and sciences, originally brought by them into this island, and, in the next place, upon the introduction of Christianity, when several terms of Divinity, before unknown, were necessarily incorporated in the language. But all these are easily distinguishable as wanting the primitive characteristics of the genuine words. Several of these borrowed terms are enumerated in the Arch. Brit. p. 32. With respect to some other words, that have an affinity with the Roman, they were undoubtedly, as Mr. Llwyd properly observes, brought here by the first inhabitants long before the Romans became a separate people.

literary remains of past ages. From these it is abundantly evident, that the Welsh language is precisely the same in this day as it was in the twelfth century: and, if an intercourse of six hundred years with the English has produced no change, it may safely be concluded, that the preceding period, before such intercourse happened, was still less likely to have such an effect. And, indeed, from all the testimony, that remains to us, there is no reason to doubt, that the modern Welsh tongue is in every essential point the same as that in use in this country on its first invasion by Cæsar. The arguments, that may be employed in support of this assumption are, in the highest degree, satisfactory; but a better opportunity must be selected for their examination\*. In the mean time it will sufficiently answer the purposes of this inquiry, if it should appear, from what is here adduced, that of all the languages, derived from the Cimbric, the Welsh retains, most purely, the character of its original. Its primitive and independent qualities,—its elementary peculiarities,—its uniform structure, and, particularly, the close affinity of the name, by which it is known, with the Cimbric†, bear ample testimony to the fact. And, indeed, so strong is the presumption in favour of the language in this particular, that it would be hardly too much to assert its actual identity with the ancient Cimbric in all its important characteristics.

Enough, it is hoped, has now been said to point out the advantages to be derived in etymological inquiries from a competent knowledge of the Welsh tongue. This, it is true, has already been done by some authors of eminence, and particularly by Mr. Llwyd in his celebrated *Archæologia Britannica*; but no writer on the subject has fully investigated that remarkable faculty, which pervades this language, of resolving all its words into their elementary parts‡. The *phenomena*, resulting from this prin-

\* This will necessarily occur in the course of the Dissertation on the Welsh Language already commenced in the CAMBRO-BRITON.

† This name is *Cymraeg*, or the speech of the *Cymry*, the definition of which latter word will be found in the sequel.

‡ An exception ought, perhaps, to be made in favour of Mr. Owen Pughe's Dictionary, so often mentioned with approbation in the course of this work, and in which the etymons of all the Welsh words are supplied with the usual accuracy of its author. But, as this is not, in strictness, an etymological work, a liberal investigation of the subject is still a *denderatūm*. Had M. De Gebelin been versed in the Welsh tongue, he would, most probably, have done what is now wanted in his admirable treatise on the "Origin and Progress of Language."

ciple, are truly extraordinary, since there is not a genuine Welsh term, which may not thereby be defined with the nicest precision. And, if it should be shewn, that many foreign words, inexplicable in their own languages, may likewise be elucidated by a reference to the component elements of the Welsh, it would go far to establish the primitive character, which has already been claimed for it. Now this is a fact, which may be satisfactorily illustrated, and, no doubt, with some pains, to a very considerable extent. A few examples will here be given, which will serve at the same time to expose the fallacy, already noticed, of terminating our etymological researches in the Latin or Greek, when even the elements of those languages may be traced to one of still higher antiquity.

Of all words the most ancient were, no doubt, the names of countries, mountains, rivers, the sun, moon, sky, and all those external objects of nature, the ideas of which must necessarily have taken precedence, in the human mind, of its more abstract conceptions. Now it is certain, that there are many such names, which are without a meaning in the languages, in which they are used, and must therefore be considered either as wholly insignificant or as having reference to some more ancient tongue in which they originated. Yet it cannot be rationally presumed, that names were at first adopted merely at random. Even the most arbitrary were selected from some accidental circumstance connected with the object they were employed to denote \*. The natural inference, therefore, is, that, where a word is indefinable in the language, in which it is used, we must conclude it to have been originally borrowed from some other. Numerous instances will readily occur of terms thus employed in English, which are to be traced to the French, German, and other continental tongues, and in which alone their roots are to be found. If this be true of words comparatively of modern origin, how much stronger must be the position when it relates to the ancient names of countries and of such natural objects, as must have received their distinctive appellations in a primitive state of society. And many of these, it may be proved, as we find them in the Latin and Greek tongues, and which are without any rational meaning in those languages, are still to be explained in Welsh on the principle already adverted to. A few instances will now be selected ;

\* It would be easy to enumerate many words in English of this description : such are the popular terms Whig and Tory, with many modern denominations appropriated to recent discoveries.

but a satisfactory elucidation of the subject must be reserved for another occasion.

**CIMBRI**:—from *Cyn*, first or primitive, and *Bro* a people, adopted either on account of their priority of descent from the Noachidæ, or of their being the first race, that colonized Europe. The Greek name Κίμμεριοι, as well as the Welsh one *Cymry*, or *Cymmry*, have evidently the same derivation: the *bro*, in both instances, being converted into *mro* upon a principle of mutation, no doubt, anciently common, and still retained in the Welsh language. The Cimbri are also called by different authors Gomari, Gomeræi, and Gomaritæ, by the same rule, that *Cymry* is occasionally written *Gymry* according to the influence of the preceding word: and hence some writers have erroneously imagined the Cimbri or *Cymry* to be so called from Gomer \*.

**CELTÆ**:—from *Cél*, a shelter or place of concealment, originating in the circumstance of the Celts living in woods and coverts, and of which both Cæsar and Tacitus speak in allusion to some of the ancient inhabitants of this island †. Hence *Ceiltwys* and *Celtiaid* imply in Welsh the people of the coverts. This explanation is at once simple and rational: and it is somewhat surprising, that it escaped the notice of the learned and ingenious author of the “Celtic Researches,” who, after attempting a Hebrew etymology, conceives the word to be derived from *Cilet*, signifying, he says, “extreme corners or retreats, and also northern regions,” whence he concludes *Celtæ* to mean “men of the extremity ‡.”

\* Among others, that have fallen into this error, is Mr. Davies, in his “Celtic Researches,” p. 124, where he considers the “*Cymry* or *Cimmerii* to be nothing more than *Gomerii*.” But, although C becomes G by a natural mutation, the last mentioned letter is never changed into the former. Mr. Edward Williams, in his “*Lyric Poems*,” vol. ii, p. 7, very properly calls this “a wild conjecture and groundless etymology,” as is that also, which derives the word from *Camber*, one of the fabulous heroes of Geoffrey of Monmouth. But English etymologists are still wider from the mark. One tells us, that the Cimbri were so called from their warlike habits, and another that the word is derived from “*kym*, one of the most ancient Celtic words, signifying a mountain.” See “*Lemon’s English Etymology*,” under the word “*Kymbro-Britons*.” The etymology, above offered, has already been partially noticed in the *CAMBRO-BRITON*, No. 2, p. 44, in the Note.

† See *CAMBRO-BRITON*, No. 2, p. 48.

‡ See *Celt. Res.* p. 124. Any one, desirous of seeing to what extravagance conjectures may be carried on such an occasion, may consult “*Lemon’s English Etymology*,” under the word “*Celt*,” where a variety of wild etymologies are collected, which a proper knowledge of the Welsh tongue would most probably, have excluded.



**SCYTHÆ**.—from *Cythu*, to expel or disperse, with the prefix *Ys*, so common in the Welsh language. The elision of the *Y*, usual in numerous instances, would form the words *Sgythi*, *Sgythiaid*, or *Sgythwys*, all implying the “expelled or dispersed people,” a designation particularly applicable to the Scythians, who, as we learn from ancient writers, were actually dispersed over various countries in the earliest ages \*. Tribes of this name existed in Syria, Egypt, Asia Minor, and the northern extremities of Europe: and in some places they were also called *Cuthites*, a word approaching still nearer to the presumed etymon.

**EGYPT**.—The name of this celebrated country, called by the Greeks *Αἴγυπτος*, and by the Romans *Ægyptus*, has been adopted from them with little variation in all modern languages. The Welsh, however, have always given it an appellation of their own, which is remarkably expressive of the natural characteristics of Egypt. This name is *Aift*, and appears to be formed from *aiv* the aggregate plural of *av* a flow or stream, which must be allowed to be particularly appropriate. And it tends to confirm the primitiveness of this term, that *Ait*, as we learn from Bryant †, was an ancient name of Egypt. The Greek word, from which the Latin is evidently borrowed, may therefore be derived from the Welsh roots *Aig* and *Aifti*, which imply, conjunctively, a region of prolific floods ‡.

**CÆLUM**.—The etymology of this word has hitherto been supposed to be *Κοῖλον*, the Greek term for *hollow*. But may it not have had its origin in the Welsh *Celu*, to conceal, of which *Cêl*, already noticed, is the root? This would apply very aptly to *Cælum* or Heaven: and it is somewhat singular, that one of the old Welsh terms for the Deity is *Celi* or the Mysterious One, which has the same derivation. The original meaning of *Cælum* would, according to this explanation, be the place of mysterious concealment: and what could be more appropriate? §

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\* Several interesting observations on this subject, by Mr. Owen Pughe, may be seen in the first volume of the *Cambrian Register*, p. 12 *et seq.*

† “*Analysis of Ancient Mythology*,” vol. i. p. 426.

‡ The common etymology, given of this name in the Dictionaries, is the Greek word *αἶψα* to burn, “because,” as we are told, “the natives are generally sun-burnt.”

§ It may be here remarked, that a great deal might be done in etymology by giving the letter *C* its proper and original sound, and which it retains in Welsh. Thus *Calum* would be *Kælum*, and not *Sælum*, as now pronounced, and would be brought still nearer to the Welsh etymon, which would, on the same principle, be yet more conspicuous in the French *Ciel* and the Italian *Cielo*.